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ABSTRACT

A Norwegian study of the effectiveness of teaching young children to read and write using their vernacular as the medium of instruction is reported. In 1980-81 and 1981-82, ten classes of beginning primary students were given all initial instruction in reading and writing in the vernacular. Because no language standardization occurs in the Norwegian classroom, teaching in the dialects was considered an instructional principle rather than a method. The experiment took place in three urban and rural regions with three different dialects. Teachers used their preferred methods, adjusting texts to the dialect in their locality and treating the spelling of the language as phonemically as possible. Toward the end of the first year, teachers gradually but explicitly began to use the standardized written language in their teaching. After the first year, the children's progress was tested with two standardized reading measures. The children were also grouped according to general intelligence and intellectual achievement, and the less able students from the dialect groups had better scores on the standardized reading measures than did their counterparts taught by traditional methods. It is concluded that the dialect principle may have made illiterate children more able to analyze their own speech than would traditional methods, increasing their metalinguistic consciousness and phonological maturity. (Five tables are included.) (MSE)

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Tove Bull: TEACHING SCHOOL BEGINNERS TO READ AND WRITE IN THE VERNACULAR.

The empirical data of this paper are resulted from a research project from the years 1980 to 81 and 1981 to 82 when ten classes of Norwegian school beginners, 7 year olds, received all initial teaching of reading and writing in the vernacular.

The Norwegian primary school council (Grunnskolerådet) was responsible for the project, and I was engaged to carry out the research. The project was supported financially by the Norwegian Department of Education.

Three different geographical areas were represented in the project. This also means three completely different dialects. The ten classes to take part were chosen from schools in Tromsø, in Northern Norway, at Stranda, on the west coast, and in Stavanger, on the south-west coast. Schools both in urban and rural areas were picked out. Furthermore, five of the classes were later on to be taught nynorsk (New Norwegian) as their first written language, and five were to be taught bokmål (Dano-Norwegian).

All in all more than 200 pupils received their initial teaching in the vernacular during their first year in school. In Spring 1982 7 of the classes (i.e. about 130 pupils) were tested by standardized reading tests. Four control-classes were tested by the same tests.

To understand why Norwegian school authorities engaged in this kind of research, it is important to bear in mind that since 1878 laws and regulations have tried to protect the vernacular in the schools.

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No Standardization of the spoken language of the children is to take place in Norwegian elemantary schools. Students and teachers speak their own dialects; this is the normal situation in Norwegian class-rooms.

Thus Norwegian tradition is different from the tradition of other so-called "civilized" countries, where teaching and learning a standardized spoken language is normal and regarded as an important task in schools.

Nevertheless, all forms of spoken Norwegian are not considered equally socially acceptible. The written language bokmål (Dano-Norwegian) and the spoken variant derived from that have higher social status than dialects and the vernacular of lower social classes.

Because the vernacular is accepted as spoken language and also as a means for teaching and learning all school-subjects, the idea of using the vernacular as a medium for teaching and learning to read and write, immediately suggests itself. For more than 100 years now this idea has - at regular intervals - been considered and discussed. The relationship between written and spoken language has always been and will always be a relevant topic when methodology of initial teaching of reading and writing is discussed, because of the pedagogical problems this relationship arises.

The special reasons why this idea arose again during the 1970's have to do with what we call "green values", opposition against urbanizing and sentralizing trends in society. In Norway as in other European countries these trends developed into a "dialect-wave". During this period the Swedish scholar Tore Österberg and

his work from 1961 Bilingualis and the First School Language were rediscovered, and this important work was to inspire the planning of a more or less corresponding project in Norway.

The aim of the Norwegian project may be described as two-sided. First the project was carried out because the principle of dialect-teaching was thought to be a pedagogical advantage. Secondly, it was also argued that dialect-teaching is a fair claim on social justice, from the point of view of the dialect-speakers.
The research has mostly consentrated on dialect-teaching as a potential tool of improving reading ability and understanding of school-beginners.

It is important to stress that dialect-teaching is not a method of teaching but rather a principle of teaching. Dialect-teaching as it was carried out in my project, left the teachers free to adapt their own methods. The only rules for the teachers to follow were the rules about which character makes which sound. The writing of the dialect aimed at a more or less complete phoneme to grapheme relationship. But only the characters of the latin alphabet, included the letters æ, ø and å, were to be used. This rule resulted in solutions as these examples show: sj for , ng for n. There will be no time to go into details as far as transcription is conserned. I'll only mention that the problems were discussed and solutions were decided on beforehand. The instruction to the teachers was to write the dialect as phonematic as possible by the letters of the alphabet, the pronunciation of the word in isolated position being the norm of transcription.

As I have said the teachers were left free to adapt their own methods. Some of the teachers chose to rely upon the method of a primer, the texts in the book then being adjusted to the dialect in the locality. Other teachers did not use a primer at all; the classes being taught according to some sort of language experience approach, which in Scandinavia has been given the abbreviation LTG (reading on the basis of the speech).

Towards the end of the first year the teachers gradually started to use the standardized written language in their teaching, always being very explicit about it, telling the children what they did and why they did it. The writing of the children, however, was never corrected at this stage.

The last part of this papar will concentrate on some of the results as far as reading and writing ability is concerned.

Two different standardized reading tests were used, one for testing the ability of reading aloud lists of words and one for testing the ability of silent reading and word recognition. All the children were tested in the course of May or June, after about one year in school.

The chosen tests are rather old, the one for testing the ability of reading aloud dates back to the 60's, but was revised in 1978. The one for testing silent reading was standardized in the middle of the 70's. There are versions of the tests in bokmål and nynorsk.

Comments on Høgtlesingsprøve 1: (Table 1)

As we see, the arithmetical average of the scores is 40, according to the standardizarion of the test. The dialect-children have achieved 44 points against 31,7 amongst the control classes. The difference is statistically significant, the significance being .0002. Trends in these findings point at the poorer children as the ones who have benefited the most.

Comments on stillelesingsprøve 1: (Table 2)

This test is standardized in accordance with the reading ability of children in the middle of the second grade. This means that it is a rather difficult and strenuous test for first-graders. Here the results show a much smaller difference between the two groups. But still the difference is in favour of the dialect-children. But this difference might be accidental, though we still see the same tendencies as the results of the former test showed: the poorer children in the dialect groups having higher scores than the poorer children in the control-groups.

Table 3

If we group the children into three different groups according to general intelligence and intellectual achievement at school, we get these results: From these tables, especially from the one showing the results of silent-reading and word recognition, we see that it is the poor children who have benefited the most.

How are these results to be interpreted and understood. My ultimate, but still hypotetical explanation is that the dialect-principle may have made illiterate children more able to analyse speech, thus increasing and improving their metalinguistic consciousness and phonological maturity, than traditional initial teaching of reading and writing achieves. And that is why we find these children as better readers after one year in school, compared to children who have learned to read and write according to traditional methods.

Error-analysis of the writing of the children also seem to point at an explanation based upon the children's ability to analyse their own speech.

Comments on tables: (4 and 5)

All the classes had half an hour around the first of June for creative writing. Most of the children wrote about the celebration of the 17th of May, our national day. But there were some complications. In the works from one of the control-groups I found several passages of text directly copied from the primer which was used in the class. Many of the children had copied a text in stead of writing creatively themselves. Therefore I have divided the control-classes into two groups on the tables, one group with the class with the copied texts, and one without this particular class.

The table shows that the length of the written works of the two groups is about the same. Neither does the frequence of errors differ very much.

Analysing the types of errors more closely we will find interesting results.

As one might have expected, dialect-children make quite a few dialect-correlating errors, 46,8%, while the control-classes have made about 30% dialect-correlating errors.

Distribution of double and single consonant in Norwegian orthography is rather difficult for many children and is not taught in the first grade at all. Therefore errors of this type form a separate cathegory. About 30% of the errors of both groups are double/single consonant errors.

While the dialect-children made more dialect-correlating errors than the control-group, the control-groups make more of what I have called "other errors". "Other errors" are for instance mixing-ups of p/b, t/d, k/g, f/v, m/n etc.
Futhermore simplifications, like skole > sole, springe > spine.
And errors which show that the reading direction is not yet automathized: fra > far, rom > mor.
Also hyper-correct forms as nor in stead of når, hvakker in stead of vakker belong to this cathegory.

In my opinion these errors are much more serious than the dialect-correlating errors. I also think that these differences support the view that the dialect-children have gained a greater meta-linguistic consciousness and have become more mature, phonologically. That is to say that they have developed an ability to analyse speech, their understanding of the alphabetical principle seems to be greater than that of the control-children.

At last I'll mention that I also made some of the dialect-children and some of the control-children read short texts in their own dialect. This took place during the period of testing (in May/June). When a child had finished the reading, I asked her or him to comment on the language of the text. The dialect-children seemed to be able to give rational comments, as for instance: "This is how I speak", "This is the language we learned to read, but now we read "bokmål"". They could also say something about the difference between the dialect and the standard.

The control-children however got confused and some of them rather aggressive, saying, "This is wrong", "Look at the stupid mistakes". When I asked them if they knew anyone who talked like this, all of them gave negative answers. I pressed them a bit, and then some of them looked at me, hopefully, and said, "You!" My dialect is completely different from that of the children being tested! But probably somebody was to blame, and I was near at hand.

As already mentioned I think the principle of teaching (starting in the vernacular and gradually approaching the standard, being very explicit about the process) made the dialect-children more conscious about the relationship between spoken and written language. Thus they learned to analyse their spoken language precisely and

correctly, especially phonemically, developing their metalinguistic consciousness and maturity; this being an advantage in the process from illiteraly to literacy.

Paper presented at the World Congress of Applied Linguistics, Brussels, Belgium, August 5-10, 1984

Test: Bodil Skjånes Dugstads høgtlesingsprøve 1.

READING-ABILITY - 7 dialect-classes (reading aloud).

	NUMBER OF PUPILS	NUMBER OF WORDS CORRECTLY READ	AVERAGE
Nynorsk	75	3342	44,6
Bokmål	46	1986	43,2
Both	121	5328	44,0 (Norm:40)

DISTRIBUTION ACCORDING TO A STANINE SCALE.

	Points	Nynorsk	Bokmål	Nynorsk and bokmål
1	-21	13.3% (10)	8.7% (4)	11.6% (14)
2	22-28	16% (12)	17,4% (8)	16.5% (20)
3	29-33	9,3% (7)	13% (6)	10,7% (13)
4	34-37	5,3% (4)	4,4% (2)	5% (6)
5	38-45	18,7% (14)	17.4% (8)	18,2% (22)
6	46-58	10,7% (8)	15.2% (7)	12,4% (15)
7	59-69	9,3% (7)	15.2% (7)	11.6% (14)
8	70-84	13,3% (10)	6,5% (3)	10,7% (13)
9	85-	4% (3)	2,2% (1)	3,3% (4)

READING ABILITY - 4 control-classes (reading aloud).

NUMBER OF PUPILS	NUMBER OF WORDS CORRECTLY READ	AVERAGE
63	1996	31.7 (Norm:40)

DISTRIBUTION

	Points	% of pupils	Number of pupils
1	-21	30.2%	(19)
2	22-28	15.9%	(10)
3	29-33	17.5%	(11)
4	34-37	9.5%	(6)
5	38-45	9,5%	(6)
6	46-58	6,4%	(4)
7	59-69	6,4%	(4)
8	70-84	4,8%	(3)

·TEST: BODIL SKJÅNES DUGSTADS STILLELESINGSPRØVE 1: ORDOPPFATNING.
SILENT READING TEST, STANDARDIZED FOR PUPILS IN THE SECOND GRADE (NOV./DEC.).

SILENT READING - DIALECT-CLASSES

	NUMBER OF PUPILS	POINTS	AVERAGE
NYNORSK	74	3798	51,2
BOKMÅL	45	2295	51
BOTH	119	6084	51,1

DISTRIBUTION

	POINTS	NYNORSK	BOKMÅL	NYNORSK AND BOKMÅL	NORM 2.GRAD
1	0-34	8,1% (6)	4,4% (2)	6,7% (8)	3,8%
2	35-43	12,2% (9)	15,6% (9)	13,5% (16)	7,1%
3	44-50	17,6% (13)	22,2% (10)	19,3% (23)	12,3%
4	51-55	18,9% (14)	22,2% (10)	20,2% (24)	17,8%
5	56-59	21,6% (16)	15,6% (7)	19,3% (23)	21,3%
6	60-62	9,5% (7)	8,9% (4)	9,2% (11)	20,7%
7	63	8,1% (6)	2,2% (1)	5,9% (7)	8,8%
8-9	64	4,1% (3)	8,9% (4)	5,9% (7)	7,9%

SILENT READING - CONTROL-CLASSES

NUMBER OF PUPILS	POINTS	AVERAGE
64	3070	48,0

DISTRIBUTION

	POINTS	% OF PUPILS	NUMBER OF PUPILS	NORM 2.GRAD
1	0-34	15,6%	(10)	3,8%
2	35-43	6,3%	(4)	7,1%
3	44-50	23,4%	(15)	12,3%
4	51-55	20,3%	(13)	17,8%
5	56-59	23,4%	(15)	21,3%
6	60-62	7,8%	(5)	20,7%
7	63	1,6%	(1)	8,8%
8-9	64	1,6%	(1)	7,9%

READING ALOUD

DIALECT-CLASSES

	"Bright" pupils	"Average"	"Poor" pupils
Number of pupils	40	61	20
Points	2432	2346	510
Average	60,3	38,5	25,5

CONTROL-CLASSES

	"Bright" pupils	"Average"	"Poor" pupils
Number of pupils	22	31	10
Points	939	937	100
Average	43,6	30,2	10

SILENT READING

DIALECT-CLASSES:

	"Bright" pupils	"Average"	"Poor" pupils
Number of pupils	40	59	20
Points	2304	3011	756
Average	57,6	51	37,8

CONTROL-CLASSES

	"Bright" pupils	"Average"	"Poor" pupils
Number of pupils	22	32	10
Points	1217	1565	287
Average	55,3	48,9	28,7

Table 4

WRITING - LENGTH AND FREQUENCE OF ERRORS.

	Number of pupils/ written works.	Number of words.	Average number of words per pupil.	Number of errors.	Average per pupil.	Number of errors in relaion to number of words.
Dialect-groups	104	4267	41	1255	12,1	One error per 3,4 word.
3 control-groups	46	2021	43,9	563	12,2	One error per 3,5 word.
2 control-groups	22	692	31.5	240	10.9	One error per 2,9 word.

Table 5.

WRITING - TYPES OF ERRORS.

	Dialect-correlating errors.	Double/single consonant.	Other errors
Dialect-groups	46,8%	29,6%	23,6%
3 control-groups.	29,1%	31,3%	39,6%
2 control-groups	30,8%	30,9%	38,3%